

Closing The Gap: Training, Education And Industry Support

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As the UK struggles to provide new graduates with degree-relevant employment, Mark Trompeteler of the British Kinematograph, Sound & Television Society asks whether accredited courses are the way forward...

There was a time in the media industries when very few of the people employed had any kind of university education. People were also very suspicious of anyone who had been to film school and it was something you kept quiet about if you had been. In the very early seventies the first few UK degree courses in film and then television production appeared. Some were based on a tradition of craft and production skills courses in such established places as Guildford and Regent Street Polytechnic. An auspicious good start occurred at that time when the highly regarded film production course at the then Polytechnic of Central London was accredited by the then major union, the ACIT (now BECTU). Over the next few decades, events conspired to make training far from straightforward, including the massive move towards independent production companies, the casualisation of the labour force to short-term contract work and freelancing as being the

norm. Then there was the massive cutback in training departments, and training budgets, within the major broadcasters and other employers.

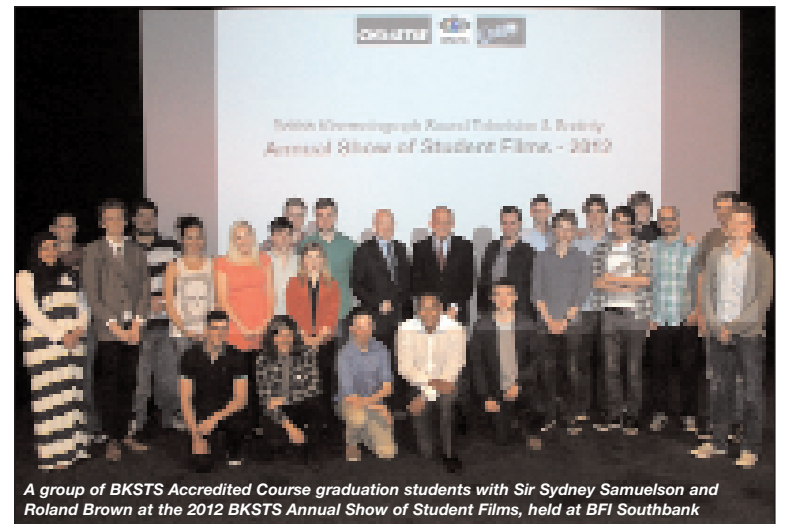
"The situation for employers being faced with a large selection of apparently enthusiastic applicants isn't straightforward"

Also significant was the debacle of "media studies" degree courses. Media Studies became one of the most popular subjects studied at UK universities for over ten consecutive years. The discipline of media studies is an offshoot of cultural, critical and sociological studies and the unrealistic expectation that it could possibly lead to any significant large numbers finding appropriate entry level production jobs in our industries led to renewed suspicions of all moving image degree courses. The rapid move to computer and digital technology throughout the production and post-production process and the increased requirement for knowledge of IT, data, network, dataflow management systems, alongside the former technical and creative skills, has put more strain on training needs. The sheer number of university degree courses that could have connections to our industries has

further complicated matters.

Today, to make the transition from being a graduate from a good production-based degree course to becoming a productive and effective entry-level employee isn't always easy for either the graduate or employer. The situation for employers being faced with a large selection of apparently enthusiastic applicants isn't straightforward. Universities have always, and still do consider themselves primarily to be educational establishments. In the past, employers who then invested far more generously in training expenditure often worked on the basis of a tacit arrangement between themselves and universities along the lines of; "If you send us 75% trained potential employees that are also well rounded educated individuals with the right personal traits, we will induct and train them in the latest kit and technology we are using". Today one wonders if confusions about education and training still exist and whether in such drastic reductions in the former industry-based training departments and budgets there is too high an expectation that all graduates should be fully trained in the very latest technology before their first day at work?

No one doubts the great work that Skillset and the independent training organisations and companies do in the training landscape. However, the BKSTS feels that if the industry took more account of accredited HE courses and the real potential that these have to provide a constant stream of appropriately experienced, adaptable



A group of BKSTS Accredited Course graduation students with Sir Sydney Samuelson and Roland Brown at the 2012 BKSTS Annual Show of Student Films, held at BFI Southbank

and forward-thinking entrant employees – there would be a more solid base to the UK's training landscape for our industries. BKSTS accredited courses have to meet rigorous industry-focused standards to gain their accreditation. Accredited courses are subject to industry body scrutiny; have industry advisory panels, contacts with both production and manufacturer employers, industry links via competitions and festivals, live briefs, periods of work placement, work based learning, staff with industry backgrounds and regular industry visitors. Students from BKSTS Accredited courses have high success rates in finding employment in our

industries. But in the demanding times of today such worthwhile accredited courses need even greater industry support and engagement than ever before. A greater synergy in fulfilling the training and education needs of our industries would be achieved if there was greater engagement between employers in the industry, industry manufacturers and these accredited courses. We need to build on the range of mechanisms to achieve this if we are to close more training gaps and have the future workforce that our industry deserves.

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A student editing material in a Staffordshire University post-production area